

# Understanding Addiction

Welcome to the spring edition of the Family Drug Help newsletter focusing on families understanding addiction.

For many, understanding addiction is like an eternal search for the Holy Grail – if only it could be grasped, its knowledge drunk and the desperate thirst for answers quenched. Addiction has been part of the human experience for millennia, and many theories and models have evolved to conceptualise and inform its treatment. But there is no smoking gun, no silver bullet, and no one size fits all approach. This can leave us feeling frustrated, discouraged and isolated. If we try to understand addiction without considering our place in the experience, we lose sight of how we may be being affected.

Addiction does not occur in isolation. As family, we have the valuable opportunity to learn and understand, but recognise that we ultimately have no control over another's behaviour. Like COVID, we know about safe distancing, ways to minimise spread and so on, but we still have to live with the experience and make what positive changes we can.

Family Drug Help is here to provide support, care, and opportunities to understand your experience of addiction. We know that when families are well supported, it has a positive impact on their loved one.

We also know that people change, and recovery happens – but there is no linear line, no neat formula.

We are excited to share insights and perspectives from our volunteers and program updates. One of these, the BreakThrough program, has as its new tag line "Families understanding addiction". It provides valuable insights and information about addiction, while exploring useful strategies and options to support families.

Spring is a symbolic season of hope and possibility.

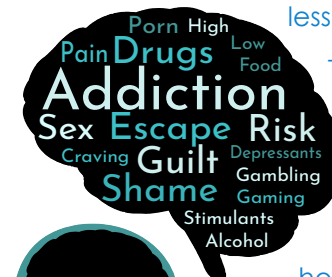
From all of us at FDH, take care and keep safe.

Robert Campbell

Programme Manager Family Drug Help

## Families understanding addiction A Counselling Perspective

When families are unwillingly thrust into the world of addiction, we are usually quite overwhelmed. We sense things have changed for the worse and we are understandably scared. We watch people we love lose themselves to their drug and we grieve. We are in a world that is unfamiliar and filled with worry, unpredictability and stress. We find ourselves on the brink of despair. We protest because we love them, the trouble is our protests feel like condemnation. We become stuck in a relentless pattern of dysfunction.



This is where counselling can help. We often insist that the person that is using substances seek treatment – but so can we to help us truly understand their distress and how we relate to it. It's important to examine our own stigmas, negative stereotypes and beliefs around addiction. Families are instrumental in the recovery of the person using substances but only when the family have been supported in learning new ways of understanding and behaving.



## Who am I?

If we can find compassion instead of anger, knowledge instead of assumptions, boundaries instead of indecision, acceptance instead of resentment, the recovery of the family unit can begin. It's a bold move to examine our role in how the problem is perpetuated, identify the things that we do that aren't helpful and of course celebrate the things we do that are right, but we must.

Tracey, Counsellor

# BREAKTHROUGH

families understanding addiction

At Family Drug Help, we continuously learn and evolve through connecting with families. Whilst Ice (Methamphetamine) use is still a huge issue for families, there are often other substances and addictions that are associated with Ice use. Poly-drug use presents increased dangers, including safety risks for families. Breakthrough provides families the opportunity to get good clear information and the support they need. The Breakthrough program has now broadened its focus to provide facts, strategies and support options for those impacted by substance use and behavioural addictions such as gambling.

During the COVID pandemic, the program has been adapted to an online format, which provides a much greater scope for families from all areas to be able to join and participate for the 1 hour sessions.

Project Lead Glenn Hunter and Facilitator Nicola Scarlett from SHARC Family Drug Help team up in the interactive and casual weekly sessions with Anna Guthrie from Turning Point. Participants can remain anonymous and call-backs are offered privately after the sessions for those wanting to talk about any specific issues.

Breakthrough continues to be a FREE workshop, where everyone is welcome. Above all, Breakthrough shows that you are not alone!

Call FDH 1300 660 068 or register now at [www.breakthroughforfamilies.com](http://www.breakthroughforfamilies.com)



**Glenn Hunter**  
Project Lead



**Nicola Scarlett**  
Facilitator



**Anna Guthrie**  
Turning Point

## **Understand the emotions behind addictive behaviour**

“My son said he only feels good when he is gambling. He can’t wait to get paid so he can gamble it all away again.” - a father’s comment

Gambling addiction is a behavioural addiction and is recognised as a mental health disorder. Behavioural addiction, like substance addiction, is a compulsion to engage in a behaviour or to use a substance, despite the negative consequences or outcomes. At its worst, it leads people to do things they would normally never do like lying, cheating or stealing. They may even physically harm someone who gets in their way.



## **The sun rises every morning So do I**

**Darkness – Diana**

Sun melts away  
Dusk steps in...fleetingly  
Darkness descends  
Envelopes, Embraces  
Fear departs

Mysterious star spread  
Shimmering lights upon a midnight sky  
Peace comes in,  
Stillness by its side

Is it a dream  
Will it linger awhile?  
Silence can be heard, floating by

Sleep – precious gift,  
Bestows comfort and rest  
Darkness stays softly  
Renewing courage and hope  
And the Sun is waiting in the wings

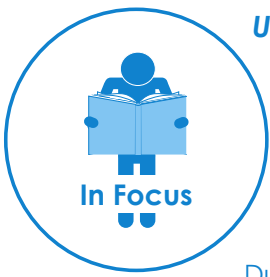
Like any addiction, gambling is a complex issue. There is not one single cause that would apply to every compulsive gambler, but motivations for gambling were summed up by Mental Health First Aid Australia as: Escaping problems or negative emotions - for some, they experience time when they don’t have to think or feel. It is like a numbing experience where their worries and cares disappear and their problems are forgotten.

People who are addicted to gambling often have false beliefs about the chances of winning, e.g. superstitions about luck or a belief that they can beat the system. They may also feel the need to gamble with increasing amounts of money as a way to achieve the same amount of excitement they experienced when they first started gambling.

Our programs aim to reduce the feeling of anxiety and helplessness for families by providing helpful strategies to become unstuck. Remember: You didn’t CAUSE it, you can’t CURE it, and you can’t CONTROL it.

For information about our program and Zoom support group contact [Angela Ireland on fgh@sharc.org.au](mailto:Angela.Ireland@sharc.org.au)  
<http://www.familygamblinghelp.org.au/>

*Adapted from: Mental Health First Aid Australia. Helping someone with gambling problems: mental health first aid guidelines. Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2015*



### Understanding Addiction: an InFocus perspective

The InFocus Education program provides information on the issues affecting families as well as providing strategies to manage relationships and reconnect.

During the first week, we discuss the importance of understanding how a dependency can affect our loved one's physical, emotional & mental health. Understanding the negative implications a dependency can have on relationships, communication, lifestyle choices and associated problematic behaviours is a crucial first step for family members.

We understand the stress, pain and chaos that comes with addiction because we have been there. We get how often personal relationships are strained, families become disconnected and the family unit can suffer through desperate attempts to be free from addiction.

The program is facilitated by professionals who also share with you the common experience of being affected by a loved one's substance misuse.



### The role of an FDH Helpline volunteer is, first and foremost, to listen



The role of an FDH Helpline volunteer is, first and foremost, to listen. When someone who cares about a loved one's drug or alcohol use calls in, we work to support them by identifying their most pressing needs and focus on addressing them. If a caller is desperate to know why their loved one won't stop using, lies to them and steals from them or repeatedly relapses, then understanding the science of addiction can help them to blame less and to take their loved one's behaviour less personally and thus alleviate some of their pain. Helpline volunteers, however, are concerned primarily not on the science of addiction, but with how the caller might address the accompanying behaviours that are impacting them. A need to feel

in control of something which is beyond their control (their loved one's drug use) leads some to become experts in the science of addiction, driven by the thought that 'if I just knew a little more, maybe I could make them stop'.

Understanding the science of addiction is important for people to comprehend why they can't 'fix the problem'. We can't 'fix' their loved one's drug use either, but what we can do is to support callers to learn better ways to communicate with the user, make them accountable and practise boundaries that we can support them to build. All this can help to develop healthier and more positive relationships with their family member.



Leanne, Helpline Volunteer

Interested in being a volunteer at Family Drug Help? Volunteers underpin our Helpline and support groups. Find out more by visiting our website:

<https://www.sharc.org.au/family-drug-help/>



**'Expert' Opinion or Lived Experience?**

“Support Groups can offer healing, a place where members can gain insight into coping with anxiety, shame, depression and anger arising from a family member's substance abuse”

*Krystina Murray, for The Addiction Centre*



Often family members come to their first meeting armed with information about addiction, having researched widely, seeking explanation and understanding. Yet, for many, all that reading has failed to make it easier to understand, or cope with, their own loved one's addiction and challenging behaviour. So, what can a support group offer that the Mr Google and text books often can't provide?



During lockdown, support groups have adapted to fit the needs and limitations of the Zoom environment. In fact, using Zoom has made the difficult task of finding speakers much easier. Presenters seem to be much more willing to 'attend' from the comfort of their own homes. However, we would have liked to have been able to offer them one of our famous Ashburton suppers!

Our wonderful speakers have enlightened us on topics as diverse as Conscious Non-Attachment, Dual Diagnosis and Stress, Imagination and your Immune System. But more than just giving us more information, counsellors and experts have shared examples from their own practice, while speakers in recovery have retold their personal journeys with great honesty and insight.

But perhaps one of the most effective ways support groups provide understanding of addiction is through the sharing of our own stories. We do not advise or counsel, we don't have magic wands but exploring own experiences enlightens us all about what addiction means and how it affects family members, and how we can cope while still having worthwhile and meaningful lives ourselves. Our stories may differ widely but we learn from each other in a safe and compassionate space (even when that space is a Zoom room) where the sharing of information comes with empathy, compassion – and understanding.

*Jan, Support Group Peer Leader*



Time for a nice a cup of tea and to see if you can find the following words in the puzzle! Words are hidden forwards, backwards, up, down, and diagonally

F A O H B O L E M T R Y U E E A S E E P S D E  
 B D K Q R V T W G K T B H D F W I T N R P H M  
 K D D F T J B Q M E D U C A T I O N Y A K B P  
 E I T Z J G N I L L E S N U O C D U B N L O A  
 D C X C W N S N V N P F P I W E T H O X Y B T  
 V T B R E A K T H R O U G H N X M K M D R C H  
 N I W S I T O X Z N C D G N L F O H Z X P Q Y  
 U O U B U S P I H S N O I T A L E R U L S R R  
 H N S Y S P L E U J G N I D N A T S R E D N U  
 W D U R R L P E A E R A M V H S W S L X G J R  
 G O C R E L C O R M A N O I T A V I T O M I R  
 Z Q W G E Z G U R R S B V Y R E V O C E R O C  
 T Y C M P L V E R T K L C O M M U N I T Y D R  
 B K G K O W K N K I R H O P E F I A Q H M D A  
 X X H F S Z Q J R R Q N D R E F G V G C I P H  
 S G I N F O C U S T X K L R Y E G N A H C Q S

- ADDICTION
- BREAKTHROUGH
- CHANGE
- COMMUNITY
- COUNSELLING
- EDUCATION
- EMPATHY
- FDH
- HOPE
- INFOCUS
- MOTIVATION
- PEERS
- RECOVERY
- RELATIONSHIPS
- SHARC
- SUPPORT
- UNDERSTANDING